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REVIEW OF THE PAST.

A

SERMON,

DELIVERED IN DORCHESTER, DECEMBER 7, 1845,

BEING THE

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THIRTY-SEVENTH ANNIVERSARY

OF THE

AUTHOR'S ORDINATION.

BY JOHN CODMAN, D. D.,

PASTOR OF THE SECOND CHURCH IN DORCHESTER.

BOSTON:

PRESS OF T. R. MARVIN, 24 CONGRESS STREET.

1846.

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Dec. 15, 1869

To the Rev. JOHN CODMAN, D. D., Pastor of the Second Parish in Dorchester.

DEAR SIR,—In accordance with a Resolution passed at a meeting held immediately after divine service on the 14th inst., the undersigned would most respectfully solicit for the press a copy of the Sermon, preached on the occasion of the Thirty-Seventh anniversary of your ordination.

Your compliance, Sir, with this request, will, we believe, serve to keep living in the memory, and to transmit to posterity, facts, not only interesting to the members of your Parish, but to other inhabitants of this ancient town.

With sentiments of love and esteem,

Your obedient servants,

MARSHALL P. WILDER,
ROSWELL GLEASON,
JOSEPH CLAPP, JR.,
CHARLES HOWE,
} *Committee.*

DORCHESTER, DEC. 22, 1845.

SERMON.

DEUTERONOMY iv. 32.

ASK NOW OF THE DAYS THAT ARE PAST.

THE words which I have prefixed to the following discourse, form a part of the memorable address of Moses to the children of Israel, in which he recapitulated the singular events of their remarkable history, and enforced their obligations to gratitude and obedience, "according unto all that the Lord had given him in commandment unto them."

To inquire into the events of past time—especially those which concern the history of the church and the world—is natural to man, and has ever been a favorite object of attention among the wise and intelligent of every age. Hence, the rich stores of history, which have contributed so much to the improvement and delight of mankind; and hence the duty which devolves upon those, whom age and experience have qualified to speak of the past, to contribute to these stores, by perpetuating their own reminiscences of by-gone days.

With the Preacher, thirty-seven years have this day expired since he was consecrated to the work of the ministry, and the pastoral charge of this church and society.

It is natural for those who have come on the stage of life since that period, and who feel an interest in the sanctuary of their fathers, and the various events connected with its history, to ask of one, who has so long officiated at its altar, some account "of the days that are past."

Few ministers have continued in the pastoral office, in one place, so long as myself. Indeed I believe there is but one in the vicinity, including the neighboring city, that has sustained the sole charge of the same congregation so long.* This circumstance ought to be the subject of devout acknowledgment and mutual congratulation in these times of alienation, division, and party strife. How large a portion of this relation yet remains to us, is known only to Him, who seeth the end from the beginning.

In the following discourse it is my design to take a very brief view of *the past history—the present state*—and the *future prospects* of this religious Society.

I am aware that the first division of our subject will call up in the breasts of some of us emotions of a painful, as well as of a pleasing nature; and I should be disposed to pass it over in silence, did I not feel constrained, by a sense of duty to those who

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* Rev. Dr. Pierce, of Brookline.

come after us, to magnify the grace of God in recording the signal interpositions of his providence in our behalf. In doing this, however, I shall carefully avoid any reflections that may be calculated to give unnecessary pain to the friends of those, who, from a misguided judgment, were led to take an active part in the controversy that agitated this society in the early part of its history.

For more than a hundred and seventy years, this ancient town constituted but one religious society, and had but one house for public worship.* The original church, which came over from England, with their pastors, in the year 1630, soon after removed, with one of their ministers,† to Windsor, in Connecticut; and another church was soon gathered, who called the Rev. Richard Mather to the pastoral office. This is now the First Congregational Church in this town. Mr. Mather continued pastor of the church for upwards of thirty years, and received as a colleague the Rev. Jonathan Burr, who

* The first place for public worship was erected on the plain, not far from 'Old Harbor,' where the first settlers landed. It was surrounded by palisadoes,—was the place for the deposit of military stores, and for resort in case of alarm from the Indians. A sentinel was kept at the gate every night, and thither the people carried their plate and most valuable articles every evening, to be preserved in safety. In 1676 a new meeting-house was erected on the hill, where the present one now stands, and the old one taken down. This place of worship having fallen into decay, and being too small to accommodate the inhabitants, a new one was raised in 1743, which was standing at the time the Second Church and Society were formed, but has since given place to a new and much improved building, which was dedicated in 1816.

† Rev. John Warham; the Rev. Mr. Maverick having died in Boston soon after the removal of the church.

lived but a short time ; and subsequently the Rev. John Wilson, who removed to Medfield, where he died. Mr. Mather was succeeded by the Rev. Josiah Flynt, who died, after continuing in the pastoral office nine years, during which he labored with great fidelity and success. Mr. Flynt was succeeded by Rev. John Danforth, who continued in the ministry nearly fifty years, and died upwards of a hundred years ago. It is a remarkable fact that there has not been a minister, who has died in the pastoral office in this town, since that period.* Mr. Danforth was succeeded by the Rev. Jonathan Bowman, who, after a ministry of upwards of forty years, was dismissed, at his own request. Mr. Bowman was succeeded by Rev. Moses Everett, who retired from the pastoral office on account of ill health, and afterwards entered upon the duties of public life. Mr. Everett was succeeded by the Rev. Dr. Harris, who resigned the entire charge of the society to his colleague, the Rev. Nathaniel Hall, the present pastor of the First church.

" In consequence of the increased population of the town, many of the inhabitants could not procure pews or convenient seats in the only meeting-house then in town ; and about sixty families attended public worship in the neighboring towns. These, and other circumstances, made it expedient to erect another house for public worship. A number of persons accordingly formed themselves into a company, purchased this beautiful site, and erected this

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* 1730.

meeting-house, in a plain but much approved style. The house was dedicated October 30, 1806, and the pews sold at auction for upwards of twenty-five thousand dollars, being above ten thousand dollars more than the whole cost of the land and building. The town was repeatedly requested to build the house, and as often rejected the request, though the expediency was generally acknowledged; the profit was therefore shared by the proprietors or original company. The whole house and land having been conveyed with the pews, the purchasers formed a second proprietorship, and applied to the town for leave to form a second parish. Many propositions were made, and articles agreed upon, and on the 19th of June, 1808, an act of incorporation for a poll parish was obtained, to which the house and land, six pews and all the common seats, were conveyed by deed of gift, agreeably to the unanimous vote of the proprietors passed the 11th day of April, 1808, reserving to individuals the pews held by them respectively." *

It is evident that the principal motive which led to the erection of this house, was a desire to increase the accommodations of public worship, without any

* See Records of the Second Church, in which the following facts are also stated. "An elegant Clock was presented to the proprietors by his Excellency James Bowdoin, Esq., Minister Plenipotentiary to the Court of Spain, and a large pulpit Bible by the Hon. John Welles, and an Organ by sundry individuals."

In 1828, a pleasant and commodious vestry was added to the house by private liberality; and in 1831, the meeting-house underwent a thorough repair; the pulpit Bible was replaced by an improved edition from the former donor, and a larger and much superior organ was substituted in the place of the old one. There are circumstances connected with the history of the old

regard to the peculiarities of religious belief. The prevailing denomination, as then acknowledged by law, was Congregational, and to that, the proprietors of this house, nominally belonged.

As might naturally be expected, the new society was composed of persons who held a great variety of religious opinions. Individuals purchased pews to suit the convenience of their locality, rather than to gratify their taste for a particular kind of preaching. Universalists, Unitarians, (although the name was then scarcely known,) those who had no settled belief, and a few who were attached to the evangelical sentiments of their fathers, were to be found among those who constituted the new society.

It will be evident to every one, that it would be difficult to find a preacher who would unite such discordant materials. A committee, however, was selected to supply the pulpit, and several highly respectable candidates were employed, without success. Among these, some few, who hear me, will recollect the Rev. Avery Williams, afterwards settled in Lexington, Ms., the Rev. Nathan Parker, late of Portsmouth, N. H., and the Rev. Elisha Rockwood, late of Westborough, Ms.

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organ, that are worthy of commemoration. That organ more than fifty years ago was the private property of the late Nathan Frazer, Esq. of Boston. It was presented by him to the First Congregational Church in Boston, and was, it is believed, one of the first, if not the first organ, that was ever introduced into the Congregational churches of New England. When the meeting-house occupied by the First Church, which then stood in Washington Street, was taken down, in consequence of the Society's removal to Chauncy Place, the organ was sold at auction, and purchased by the new Society in Dorchester. When a new organ was procured by this Society, the old one was sold to the Episcopal Church in Dedham.

In the spring of 1808, your present pastor returned from Europe, where he had been pursuing his theological studies, and, in the course of the summer, was invited to preach a preparatory lecture in this house. Some of you may probably recollect the text, on that occasion, which I trust I can repeat, with equal sincerity, at the expiration of nearly forty years,—*I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.*

Having supplied the pulpit two Sabbaths as a candidate, I received a unanimous call from the church, and an almost unanimous one from the parish, to become their pastor. This invitation, notwithstanding its great unanimity, I hesitated to accept, from a conviction that my theological opinions, which I was always ready frankly to avow, would not be acceptable to a majority of my parishioners. This hesitancy I expressed in a communication to the church and society, previous to my answer to their call,* and it was not until they had assured me of their approbation of my religious views, and their readiness to comply with some conditional requests, that I accepted their invitation.

On the 7th of December, 1808, I was solemnly ordained to the pastoral care of this church and society. Well do I remember the exercises of that day. What changes have taken place since that period! One entire generation has passed off from the stage of action—another generation has been born since that time, and are now fulfilling their parts on the theatre of life! How many have gone to give up their final account to the Judge of all for

* See pamphlet entitled 'Proceedings of Second Church,' &c.

the manner in which they have improved the ministry of the gospel!

To the heart of the pastor, who sincerely desires the salvation of his people, the return of the season cannot but be interesting, that brings to mind his ordination vows—his first entrance upon a work, which experience has proved to be full of trial—the days of his youth, when his heart beat warm with expectation—the disappointments and mortifications he has experienced—the ungrateful returns he has received for his well meant endeavors—the little good he has accomplished—and, above all, the solemn account he must give of his stewardship. So many, and so painful, are the reflections which such an occasion naturally excites, that, if I had consulted my own feelings, I would have passed it over in silence. But a sense of duty induces me to continue the narrative I have commenced of our ecclesiastical history.

It was not long after the ordination, before a serious uneasiness began to discover itself in the parish. The doctrines which were preached, were evidently uncongenial with the taste of a large number of the congregation. This uneasiness was sometimes openly manifested in the house of God. A desire began to be expressed to hear ministers of a different creed from that professed by the pastor; and, although it was well known that he had conscientious scruples as to the admission of preachers into his desk, who were not orthodox, or evangelical, in sentiment, efforts were pertinaciously persisted in to attempt to control the pulpit, and to force him

to a compliance with the wishes of the disaffected part of the society. These efforts resulted in a reference of the question in controversy, to two ecclesiastical councils—the first of which was equally divided, and the latter resulted in the continuance of the pastoral relation by the casting vote of the moderator.

Here, it was hoped, that the difficulties would have terminated, and that the disaffected would have peaceably withdrawn and left the pastor and his friends to the quiet enjoyment of their religious rights and liberties. But such expectations were disappointed. Unable to gain their object by the decision of an ecclesiastical judicatory, a majority of the parish undertook to take the law into their own hands, and, by a parish vote, dismissed their minister, and informed him that they had no need of his services after a certain day. By their committee they applied to an individual in the vicinity to supply the pulpit on the Sabbath after they expected their pastor's labors to close. The Sabbath arrived—and its intensely interesting scenes and results will never be forgotten by those of us who were present on the occasion. But I will not, I cannot, dwell upon them.* The texts which I preached from on that day, will never be forgotten. In the morning, I selected the words, *Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you;* and in the afternoon, *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*

* For an account of the proceedings on that memorable Sabbath, the reader is referred to a Review in the Panoplist, 1813.

On the next day, proposals were made for an adjustment of the difficulties that had so long existed; and on the 7th of December, 1812, exactly four years from the time of my ordination, the writings were drawn, by which the parish was amicably divided; those who remained in possession of the house, taking the pews of the disaffected at cost, and relinquishing to them their proportion of the ministerial property.

A new era now commenced in our ecclesiastical history. Our society assumed a distinctive and decidedly religious character. The parish, as newly organized, passed a unanimous vote, that the subject of ministerial exchanges should never be a matter of complaint before another ecclesiastical council, and their minister was left to the control of his own pulpit, and to the uninterrupted enjoyment of liberty of conscience.

Thirty-three years have now passed since our new organization, and we have reason to bless God and be thankful, for the peace and rest and edification we have enjoyed during that period. A gradual increase has been made both to the church and congregation, and, notwithstanding the secession from our society, the loss has been more than supplied.

A flourishing church,* of the same faith and order with ourselves, now exists in the south part of the

* The Village Church was gathered March 11, 1829. The meeting-house was dedicated September 1, 1829. The Rev. David Sandford was installed pastor of the church, July 14, 1830. He removed to Medway, September, 1838. The Rev. Daniel Butler was ordained his successor, October 31, 1838, and resigned his charge to accept an agency from the American Bible Society, January 29, 1845. The Rev. David Dyer was installed his successor, April 9, 1845.

town, which owes its origin to the success with which the Lord has been pleased to bless this society.

In looking back upon our past history, we have reason for admiring gratitude and for deep humility. The history of *The Second Church in Dorchester*, will form an important part of the ecclesiastical history of New England. The views here maintained of ministerial exchanges, led to the first stand that was taken in the great controversy that afterwards agitated the churches on the subject of Unitarianism. Had your pastor been driven from his post, it would have been the signal for an attack upon many of his brethren, who sympathized with him in his religious opinions. He felt that he was not acting for himself alone, but for others; he felt that he was acting for a cause that was infinitely dearer to him than any personal consideration—*the cause of Christ.* It was this consciousness that supported him under all his trials, that animated him under all the opposition and persecution he had to meet, and enabled him to persevere in the course he had undertaken. I have often looked back, with astonishment, upon that period. It seems, at this distance of time, almost impossible that I could have maintained my ground in defiance of such powerful opposition; but I remember the unabated cheerfulness and courage with which I was enabled to sustain the conflict, which I cannot now review, without more agitation than I experienced at the time of trial. Surely, it was God who

sustained me. If the Lord had not been on our side, we may now say, "If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when men rose up against us, then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us."

I have thus endeavored, impartially, to review *the past history*, and more particularly the *early* history, of this religious society. I have purposely refrained from any remarks upon the characters and conduct of those who differed from us. Many, if not most of them, are in their graves, and towards those who survive, I am not conscious of entertaining any other feelings than those of love and good will.

The times of religious and parochial controversy have gone by. Almost every creed, and every denomination, has its place of worship—and it is well it should be so. As in the natural, so in the moral world, "all nature's difference makes all nature's peace." When men cannot worship together in harmony, it is best that they should separate. In this wide world there is room enough for all. The language of Abram to Lot should be remembered. "Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen, for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me. If thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left." This is the temper which we wish to cherish towards those who differ

from us, and who feel disposed, from conscientious, or any other motives, to seek another place of worship. We have another example worthy of our imitation, taken from the New Testament. "Some indeed," says Paul, "preach Christ even of envy and strife, and some also of good will. The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds; but the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice."

Since the establishment of this religious society—the second in town—other places of worship of different denominations have multiplied, and may be expected to multiply, with the growth of our population. While we cherish an attachment to our own religious society, and "forsake not the assembling of ourselves together," nor violate our holy covenant by which we are solemnly bound to walk together, "in a due submission to and attendance on all the ordinances of the gospel," let us cherish feelings of kindness and good will towards professing Christians of every denomination, especially towards those, who differ from us only in forms of church government, or rites of ceremonial observance. 'If Christ is preached, we therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.'

Having dwelt so long on the past history of this religious society, it is time that we proceed, as we proposed, secondly, to consider its *present state.*

This part of our subject may be despatched with

greater brevity. I wish I could say that the present state of our religious society was a state of spiritual prosperity; but I fear this cannot be affirmed, without exaggeration. It is true there is a good degree of attendance on the means of grace; and, although other places of worship have multiplied, and are multiplying in the midst of us, we continue to have a large and respectable congregation.* How long this will be the case, must depend on the congregation themselves, as well as on the fidelity and zeal with which the services of the sanctuary are conducted; for wherever the gospel is preached fully and powerfully, there the people will flock to hear it. "Wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together." It has always been my great object to preach the gospel from this place in its simplicity and in its purity. I trust I can say with the apostle, "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech, or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And my speech, and my preaching, was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power; that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."

But, my beloved friends will suffer me to say,

* Since this Society was organized, the following places of public worship have been erected in different parts of the town—one Unitarian; one Methodist; one Orthodox—these three near the lower mills; one Baptist, in Neponset village; and two are now erecting, one for the Baptists, near the old burying ground, and one for the Orthodox, near the mill-dam.

that with all the efforts I can make, and with all my endeavors to preach the gospel, not only 'in season, but out of season,' not only 'in the temple, but from house to house,' the unity and peace of the congregation cannot be maintained without correspondent exertions on their part. The hands of the pastor must be held up by the prayers of his people. They must be willing to make sacrifices, though it may be attended with some trouble and expense, to attend their own place of worship, and that, not only occasionally, but habitually. But it is unnecessary for me to enlarge on this subject. I know not that I have more reason to complain of the want of attendance on public worship, than other ministers. My interest in the society, and my zeal to advance its welfare, must be my apology, if any apology is necessary, for introducing the subject.

In considering the present state of our religious society, it may not be inappropriate to inquire how far it has been affected by the times in which we live. The period in which our lot has been cast, has been an era of great excitement on moral and political subjects. It has been no easy matter to pilot the ship during the stormy sea of constant agitation, and to keep calm and quiet, when all around was commotion and disturbance. When I first settled in this place, *Politics* was the engrossing theme that engaged the public attention. The inhabitants of this town, and the members of this society, were divided into two great parties. Ministers were then exempted, by constitutional law, from taxation. I

felt it to be my duty not to take any part in the politics of the day; and while other pulpits were, occasionally, devoted to political sermons and orations, mine was exclusively appropriated to the absorbing theme of Jesus Christ and him crucified. I believe that the course I then pursued met with general approbation, and I have never seen reason to regret it.*

Since then the bitterness of political controversy has in a great measure subsided, and other subjects of an exciting interest have come up in their place. Among these was *the Masonic controversy*, which, in its day, had its full share of excitement. Although I never approved of the masonic institution, and was never connected with any of its societies, I carefully avoided taking any part in the political organization to which it gave rise. I would not refuse to receive into my pulpit a ministerial brother, because he had been, or was then, connected with this fraternity, nor would I consent to have my pulpit made the theatre of discussion on this subject, though applied to, more than once, for permission. No one more sincerely rejoices in the abolition of an institution so liable to objection, than myself, though I never joined in the hue and cry against those, who viewed it in a different light.

Slavery has since been the engrossing theme—and I will yield to no man in my abhorrence of this national sin, and my earnest desire and fervent

* During the war of 1812–14, the late President of the United States, the elder Adams, attended our place of worship, on a Fast day, and after service remarked, "Sir, I came to hear you preach, because I was sure not to hear anything of party politics to wound my feelings."

prayer for its immediate abolition. I have always considered it, and do now consider it, as a disgrace to our country; and one that ought to be wiped away; but I am not prepared to say that it ought to be wiped away with blood, nor to justify that course of measures, which may have a tendency to such an awful result. Great as the evil of slavery confessedly is, I am not prepared to say, that a civil war, and a dismemberment of the Union, would not be a greater calamity.

With regard to the subject of *Temperance*, which is now agitating the community, I have only to say, that no one more entirely rejoices in the wonderful reform that has been effected in this country than myself, and although I cannot approve of the course that has been adopted, in some places, of low abuse and personal invective, and wish that the cause may be managed with more discretion and less censoriousness, I am ready to acknowledge that great good has been effected, and most sincerely do I wish that the time may come when intoxication, and its numerous attendant evils, may cease from the earth.

It is well known that there are those, connected with this religious society, who have taken a deep interest in these exciting subjects, and that associations have existed among us, in which are to be found some of the most valued members of my church and congregation, for whose piety and benevolence I entertain the highest regard, and who, I verily believe, are actuated by the purest and best of motives. It has been a subject of deep regret,

that I have not been able to unite, in these associations, with those whom I so highly respect and love, for I esteem it of the first importance to the peace and unity of a religious society, that a pastor and his flock should go hand in hand in every religious or benevolent movement;—where this is not the case, there is danger of his losing that hold of the confidence and affections of his people which he ever ought to possess, and, without which, his usefulness will be greatly impaired. And it is to be deeply regretted that there is a disposition abroad to prejudice the people against their ministers, because they are not prepared to go all lengths in the advocacy of measures which neither their judgment nor their consciences can approve. That such efforts have been made, cannot be denied, and they ought to be resisted by all those who love the Christian ministry, and regard its due and proper influence on the community.

In considering the present state of this religious society, it may be proper to make a passing remark on its temporal condition, and its ability to support the gospel. I am aware of the delicacy of touching on this point, and should avoid it, were I not constrained by a regard to the welfare of the society.

I trust I need not assure the members of my congregation, that pecuniary motives have never actuated me in entering, or continuing in, the work of the ministry in this place. I very readily and cheerfully consented to make considerable sacrifices of worldly interest in the early part of my ministry, for the purpose of establishing the gospel. Those

sacrifices I have never regretted. On the contrary, there is no act of my life that has afforded me, on the review, greater satisfaction, for I can truly say, "I have not sought *yours*, but *you*." With the same apostle I can add, "I have coveted no man's silver or gold or apparel." I have esteemed your affections and regard of more value than the largest salary you could have given me. But, although I have been enabled, through the blessing of a kind Providence, to live independently of the means to be derived from my profession, I confess I have felt not a little anxious on *your* account, that some effective measures should be taken to secure an adequate support for the Christian ministry in this society. Such provision would be honorable to you, as well as of the highest importance to those who come after me in the pastoral office.

That there is sufficient ability in this congregation liberally to support the Christian ministry cannot be doubted. The only difficulty is as to the best mode of making this ability *available*. May I be permitted, with due deference, to make a few suggestions on this subject?

And, first, I would remark, that it is highly desirable that a deeper interest be felt in the temporal concerns of the society, than has hitherto been manifested. It is but once a year, that the society meets to transact its fiscal concerns, and that meeting is generally attended but by very few individuals, who, being so small a representation of the society, feel a reluctance to propose any effective measure to relieve the society from embarrassment, and to

increase its pecuniary resources. This ought not so to be. If a general interest were awakened in the congregation, and the annual meeting for pecuniary appropriations was more numerously attended, some method would be devised, by the collective wisdom of the society, to relieve its difficulties, and advance its prosperity.

Permit me to remark, secondly, that, in my judgment, one obstacle to the growth and prosperity of the society, arises from the reluctance, so generally felt by the members of the parish, to become proprietors in the house, by the purchase of pews. I am aware that if we consulted nothing but pecuniary interest, it is more economical to rent, than to purchase, pews—but the friends of a religious society ought to be actuated by higher and purer motives. It is well known that, for several years, the expenses of the society have been defrayed by a tax on the pew proprietors. If every family, connected with this congregation, who could afford it, were to purchase a pew, at a reasonable rate, the burden would be more equally divided, and the means of supporting the gospel proportionably increased. Why should not those who have formed the domestic relation, instead of being indebted to their friends, or in any other way, for a temporary seat in the house of God, possess themselves of a dwelling in the sanctuary, as well as an abode for their families, which they can call their own? Every friend of religion ought to esteem it a Christian duty to aid, according to his ability, in the support of the worship of God.

These hints, I trust, will be received with the same feelings of kindness with which they are given. The preacher has no other motive in offering them, than the best interests of this society. To him it can be of little consequence, whether the measures that have been suggested, be adopted or not. He cannot but feel that a large proportion of his ministry has passed, and he may be drawing near its close. When he looks around him on the right hand and on the left, and sees so few remaining in the pastoral office of his own age, he would be insensible, did he not feel admonished that he is approaching the end of his course. It is for his church and society, endeared to him by more than ordinary ties, that he feels deeply anxious, and it is for their good, and not for any selfish consideration whatever, that he has spoken thus plainly. He trusts that his motives will be appreciated, and that his counsels will be remembered when he sleeps in the dust.

It now only remains that we consider, as we proposed, thirdly, the *future prospects of this society.*

But what they are, is known only to Him, with whom the future is as the present. Still, we may lawfully indulge that disposition, so natural to the human mind, of looking forward into scenes of futurity, and of contemplating the possible condition of this religious society in coming time. We cannot but indulge the confident belief that a church, which has so evidently been the care of heaven in

times past, will continue to enjoy its gracious protection for the time to come.

It is true I have sometimes been ready to give way to despondency and discouragement, and to say as the apostle did of the Galatian christians, "I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain." When I have reflected upon the times of division and party spirit in which we live, and on the prospect of the increase, rather than the diminution, of this spirit; when I have considered the extraneous influences, unfavorable to peace and union, by which this society is surrounded; and when I have thought of the exciting topics that are constantly succeeding one another, like the waves of the sea, and keeping the public mind in a state of continual fermentation, I must confess that I have sometimes indulged gloomy forebodings with respect to the future condition of this beloved people. But, when I have called to mind the wonderful dealings of God's providence towards this church, in times of peculiar trial, and when I have reason to know that there is still a remnant left in our midst, who possess "like precious faith," and who continue in supplication and prayer night and day,—my desponding heart takes courage, my drooping faith revives, and the prospect before me brightens, as I seem to look down the vista of time, and behold, long after I shall have finished my course, multitudes of souls born to glory in this house, and the seed, which I have been the humble instrument of planting, taking deep root, and filling this place, and the surrounding region, with the fruits of holiness.

But this delightful and animating prospect must be connected with the faith and efforts of those who now constitute, and who may hereafter constitute the members of this religious society. Under the blessing of the Great Head of the church, every thing must depend upon them; upon their union, their devotedness, their firm and unwavering attachment to the doctrines of grace—those doctrines, dear to the hearts of our Pilgrim Fathers. With them it will rest, whether this church, which has now, for a third of a century, been known and esteemed as an *Orthodox church*, shall continue to maintain its high and elevated character, as a "pillar and ground of the truth," or, whether, after the decided stand it has taken, and all the sacrifices it has made, it shall at last give its influence to the advocacy of a lax theology, and to the general defection from "the faith once delivered to the saints."

But we will not indulge such thoughts for a moment. We have too much confidence in the faith and piety and perseverance of the present generation—and we will trust in heaven that those, who are to come after us, will, from a regard to the memory of their fathers, as well as from their own approval of the correctness of their creed, adhere, without wavering, to the ground, which, after so many difficulties, has been secured, and that to the latest generation, the Second Church in Dorchester, will be distinguished for the purity of its faith, the harmony of its course, and the steady light of its example.

I have thus endeavored, as I proposed, to consider the *past history*, the *present state*, and the *future prospects* of this religious society. But little remains to be said by way of application. One reflection, which our subject naturally suggests, is *the rapid flight of time*. It seems but as yesterday, when I was solemnly ordained to the work of the ministry in this house; and yet how many changes have taken place since that period in this church and congregation! God only knows whether we shall behold the return of another of these anniversaries. Let us be prepared for whatever may be his holy will. If this should prove the last anniversary sermon I should be called upon to preach, it is hoped that the counsels and advice contained in it, will be regarded with more than ordinary interest.

In connection with this society I have spent the best and principal part of my days, and I can truly say, that, notwithstanding the difficulties and trials necessarily attendant upon the pastoral office, in any situation, and under any circumstances, I have enjoyed a great degree of comfort and satisfaction. I have reason to think I have possessed the confidence and affections of my people, and I know my love and regard for them has constituted no inconsiderable share of the happiness of my life. It is my earnest prayer, that, in the close of my ministry, and in the evening of my days, nothing may interrupt the love and harmony we have so long enjoyed together; that an honest difference of opinion with respect to those subjects, which from time to time agitate the public mind, may produce no alien-

ation of feeling among those who are united together in the bonds of Christian love, and that we shall be willing to allow to others the same liberty we claim for ourselves, of thinking and acting *independently.*

The times, in which we live, call for a spirit of mutual forbearance. While we wish well to the benevolent enterprises of the present day, let us remember that they are to be carried forward by calm and steady, and not by violent and fitful action. Let us not forget the direction of the apostle, to "let our moderation be known unto all men—The Lord is at hand." All our motives and all our actions will soon be reviewed at his impartial tribunal, and happy shall we be, if our conduct shall then be approved by our almighty Judge.

And now, my beloved friends and parishioners, accept the best wishes and fervent prayers of one, who has always felt, and will ever continue to feel, the deepest interest in your welfare. "Peace be within these walls, and prosperity within these palaces. For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the Lord our God I will seek thy good."

Now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, be equal and everlasting praises. AMEN.